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ABSTRACT

Many considerations are involved in obtaining and using federal funds for language arts programs. Before attempting to explore funding, educators should know the basic language arts programs available in their district and what kinds of programs are fundable by particular sources. They should then develop a written program statement that includes specific objectives and evidence of need, and they should use the proposal writing period to plan carefully for the program's implementation. When implementing a funded program, school districts should give careful attention to staff training and to developing a curriculum that is integrated with the ongoing instructional program. Finally, districts should design methods for evaluating the program in terms of the needs statement, the curriculum around which it was developed, and the effects on students in the program. The evaluation results should be used to aid in program improvement. (GW)

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Rochester School District: A Working Model of the Funding Process

PRESENTATION TO

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

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I'm supposed to talk about Rochester as a model for language arts programs. People say that you become an expert by leaving home, and the further from home you are, the more expertise is credited to you. Well, Rochester is too close to New York City for me to claim to be an expert - especially in the language arts. We have people in our district who are considered experts even in Rochester.

I am not going to attempt to tell you what good language arts programs are or how to provide language experiences for children. Others with more knowledge than I have spoken about content. I am going to attempt to outline a process or strategy of planned activities within a district which can lead to success in receiving outside funding for implementation of language arts programs.

STARTING POINTS

The "regs" for many funding sources require that proposed programs support or supplement the basic local program. To begin then to develop a proposal, two things must be known and understood:

1) What are the basic Language Arts programs in your district?

2) What kinds of programs or activities are fundable by particular sources (Title I, ESAA, etc.)

Usually, when federal programs are being developed, their emphasis is

reading or math. Most districts have stacks of reading proposals which can be shuffled from funding source to funding source. This is convenient and easy, and these proposals often meet the guidelines for several funding sources. However, reading programs per se may not always be the best for kids.

We all know the language arts encompass a range of experiences which are valuable to students - many of which are critical to students in later life. In Rochester we recognize that writing skills and oral language skills are as critical as reading to a student's eventual success as an adult. Consequently, we have major programs in oral language and writing skills which either receive outside funds or are being supplemented by funded programs. These include, for example, speech and drama contests with interscholastic competition, regular publications of student writings, and kindergarten and early primary oral language programs.

Therefore, today I want to suggest some strategies which can make it convenient and profitable for districts to fund and implement programs in various areas of the language arts to expand the educational experiences of millions of students.

PROPOSALS FOR FUNDING

Most districts have specialists who deal with funding federal programs.

This is because funding is a complicated business. New programs are being created; old programs are being redesigned; regulations change; appropriations vary. Use the person who is being paid to gather this information and provide this assistance to your district. He/she can help you identify possible sources of funds and assist you in understanding the regulations and preparing the proposal.

The first step in getting funding is HAVE A PROGRAM. Don't approach your funds person with an idea. You would be surprised how many people are "pestering" the grantsperson with ideas they want funded.

"I want an aide."
"I'd like to have a Home Ec. Resource Teacher."
"I need a Vice-Principal."
"Can you get me a Xerox machine."
"I need some money for field trips."

No grantsperson is humanly able to meet all the demands for funding within the average district. To get your idea funded, your responsibility should be to make it as easy as possible for your grantsperson to include your requests in a proposal to be submitted for funding. The best way to do this is to have a program. You have a program for consideration when you have a written statement with specific objectives based on identified needs. Also included should be an outline of particular activities and strategies which, if carried out, their success in meeting the stated objectives could be determined.

Let me elaborate some on these critical points.

Put your idea in writing. Writing your program shows that you are serious about getting funded. It also requires a response which means you will have attention to your request. A written request provides opportunity for appointments and meetings to follow-up on your idea. A written request also provides the opportunity for you to share your idea with other key people within your district.

Your program has to be specific. There must be clear objectives which are addressed to a specific target population with an identifiable program content.

"I would like to develop a written composition program for 9th and 10th graders who are Title I eligible in four schools. The program will emphasize expository writing and application of those writing skills in job related situations".

Tell why the program is needed and why you think it will be successful. Show the deficiencies in language arts skills in the district. Are large percentages and/or numbers of students not passing the Basic Compentency Tests? Are students doing poorly in area or regional competitions? Are teachers in the higher grades complaining about the language arts preparation in earlier grades?

These are indications of need for the area to be addressed. The better the need is substantiated, the more likely it is that your program will get the attention necessary to be funded.

Closely allied with need is evidence of success. If another district has had good results with a similar program, this should be stated. If a recognized organization is endorsing the program, articles and promotional literature should be attached. If a local teacher has piloted the program, a summary of the results should be included in your memo.

Getting the district to seek funding for programs in the language arts is the hard part. Afterwards, it gets REAL HARD. The best advice I can give on proposal preparation is BE PATIENT. If a proposal is done properly, it is a frustrating job of writing, rewriting, refining, and revising. Many times you will seem to be jumping through hoops - Are your objectives behavioral?
- What will be the content of your Inservice?
- How will you recruit your staff?

Consideration and resolution of these kinds of questions are necessary to the funding of your proposal and can assist in implementing the proposal if it is funded.

Having written good proposals and bad proposals, I know that sometimes bad proposals get funded. My experience has also been that it is easier to

implement a program when there has been a good proposal than when there has been a poor proposal. So be patient and spend the time necessary to ensure that the proposal as written, if funded, can be successfully implemented.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FUNDED PROGRAM

After you get funded, the program must be implemented. This is what you were working towards - to provide students with certain educational experiences. This can be a traumatic experience. What has been your creation must be given to other people to implement and interpret. Unless you are the only staff person involved in carrying out the program, it will begin to change. It will change as a result of other people's values, skills, and abilities. In some cases it will only approximate the original idea that you had. This is natural, and in most cases the program will grow and be enriched by the contributions that others are making.

There are several critical aspects of program implementation which need serious attention by the administrative staff to assure successful implementation. These include staff training, curriculum development, and evaluation. I'd like to speak to each of these.

One of the most important aspects of program implementation is staff training. Staff training should be provided for the program staff, other

district staff who work with the program, and parents and community persons who are involved in either advising or responding to the program.

Training for program staff is essential. Staff must know the objectives of the program and their role in achieving those objectives. Staff must be given the opportunity to assess their needs and to assist in developing a program for the development and refinement of the skills necessary for successful program implementation. To operate a successful program you must have a staff training component which is designed in concert with the staff and which is closely monitored and revised in light of changing needs.

If you are expecting to implement your program with federal funds, you must have several alternative schemes for the initial training of staff. Federal funds are not awarded at the convenience of the school district, but at the convenience of the federal government. When the government will find it convenient to process your award is difficult to predict. You should develop alternative times and schemes for delivering the initial staff training to insure that it occurs regardless and despite of your funding date. We have had serious problems with programs where we have had to eliminate staff pre-service because of funding delays. My advice: plan ahead and be prepared!

It is important also that the program leader provide opportunities for other district staff to become knowledgeable about the program. These staff members should understand the program and have realistic expectations of program outcomes. If this is not done well, the program may suffer from informal evaluation in the teacher lounge based on goals that are not realistic or accurate.

The same goes for parents and community persons who are expected to work with the program. They must know the goals of the program and what to look for in program activities and outcomes.

Another needy area is that of curriculum development. Projects should never be isolated from the regular school curriculum. Concepts and ideas must be integrated with the on-going instructional program. This means that the project needs to have a curriculum - a specific, written system of concepts which are expected to be mastered by students, along with the suggested teaching sequence. I emphasize that this should be written. It also should be disseminated to teachers, parents, and in some cases, students. Too often the real goals and activities of federal programs are in somebody's head, never reduced to writing, and seldom shared. When the program is over and projects have a high mortality rate, the staff is dispersed and everything is lost.

A curriculum should be correlated with the goals of the on-going instructional program. The goals should be those which are easily understood and accepted by classroom teachers. The activities should be ones that can be easily incorporated into a regular classroom by the average teacher with average training. Stay away from programs with such lofty goals and refined techniques that they require highly trained specialists. When the funding ceases and the specialists disappear, whatever value the program had is lost. A program, however, which is geared to the regular classroom teacher can be incorporated into the on-going instructional program and continued as part of the mainstream.

Very often we orient our programs toward a sort of "ideal teacher" with highly developed skills and extreme dedication. We then wonder why they flop when we attempt to implement them with the average teacher and the variety of personal, social, and professional factors which impact on the classroom. Build the program to assist in resolving problems of the more common classroom teacher using techniques which are feasible given the staff's interest, training, and ability. If you can do this, the project can be a valuable asset to your district's program.

One of the most neglected areas of federal program management is evaluation. Unfortunately, it can be a critical area in terms of program success. Most of us are just not well enough trained in testing procedures, polling techniques, statistics, etc. to design an evaluation or to understand the results of an evaluation when it is presented to us. I, for example, still have difficulty remembering the difference between "median" and "mean". I think it would be a lot easier if they'd call one of them the "average".

In spite of the difficulties we simply have to design and implement proper evaluations for special programs. Federal officials are under intense pressure because of billions of dollars being spent on education with few clear results from the expenditure. We must be able to account for our use of funds by being able to demonstrate the impact of our programs in terms of their effect on student behavior and achievement.

Evaluation design does not have to be difficult. In fact, in most cases, it is better if it is not difficult. The evaluation design should be understandable and clear to the people who will be implementing the program. I will discuss a simple model which can be used to evaluate an instructional program. This evaluation is a three level evaluation which looks at the

program from three different perspectives and provides data on the program effectiveness from a variety of points of view.

The first level is to evaluate the program in terms of the needs statement. If the original proposal indicates that 75% of the seventh graders cannot write a paragraph, the proposal should have an objective to reduce the number of seventh grade students who do not know how to write a paragraph. For example: "At the end of two weeks of daily instruction, 95% of students who previously were unable to write a paragraph will be able to do so." The evaluation refers back to the original statement of need and shows the extent to which the problem was alleviated by the implementation of the program. The testing can be done by a local instrument or a commercial test.

The second level is to evaluate in terms of the curriculum around which your program has been developed. This is testing the materials and techniques which were used during the time of instruction. To what extent did the students master and retain the skills and understandings which were built into the design of the program? This design uses locally developed criterion referenced tests based on the program's curriculum. "80% of the students will exhibit mastery of ten of the twelve major concepts of the program curriculum as evidenced by performance on locally developed criterion referenced tests."

The purpose of this level is to test what has been taught. Did you effectively deliver the program that you intended to deliver?

The third level of evaluation measures the effects on students in the program in comparison to some external reference group. This is done either through the use of nationally normed tests or the use of a local control group. The purpose of this is to determine the program's impact on overall student achievement. To do this, the achievement of students in the project is compared to the achievement of students who did not participate in the project. This is an important level of your evaluation design.

Unless you have a good background in research and measurement, get help from an expert. If you get such help, insist that the process and results be explained to you - so that you understand them. Understand what is being tested and what the results signify. Get an analysis of the scores to use in determining weaknesses and strengths of the program.

The most important thing about your evaluation design is not to keep it a secret. Let people know the criteria for program success. This is most important for the people who will be implementing the program. I don't know how many times I've seen program results presented to a surprised audience of teachers who had no idea of the criteria for evaluating the program. The

response is usually, "If we knew that, we would have ....". Let people know your evaluation design.

After you get your evaluation, USE IT. Examine the results and use them in the revision of your program. Share the results with staff and give credit for positive results and look for areas for improvement.

The evaluation provides important information about your program. Try to get as much from that information as possible. There are a number of questions which the evaluation results can raise which are important to you in operating your program.

Was the program design realistic? The program may have reached all of its goals but not have had an effect on standardized test scores.

Was the program delivered? The program may not have reached its goals because it was improperly or inadequately delivered. Staff was not sufficiently trained or did not take the program seriously.

Was the program too ambitious? Some of the program goals were reached but others require a longer period of more intensive work to be reached.

Were the evaluation instruments appropriate? Did the evaluation design exaggerate either the success or failure of the program and therefore provide misleading results?

Use your evaluation results. My experience has too often been that project managers use evaluations for public relations and not for program improvement. The tendency is to publicize the positive, bury the negative and put the evaluation on the shelf. The program staff repeat their mistakes because the program is never examined.

CLOSING

There is a lot involved with obtaining and using federal funds for programs in the language arts. I have not covered all aspects of the process but have attempted to highlight some of the most important. Hopefully this has helped you to evaluate your success as a manager in obtaining and using federal funds.

Develop a written program statement which includes specific objectives and evidence of need before attempting to explore funding.

Be patient and use the proposal writing period to plan the development and implementation of your program.

Emphasize staff training and a sound curriculum.

Evaluate your program and use the evaluation to revise the program design.

The possibility of funding is enhanced by effective strategies in

seeking funds, but once funds are obtained sound planning and management will provide enriched educational experiences for children in your district.